

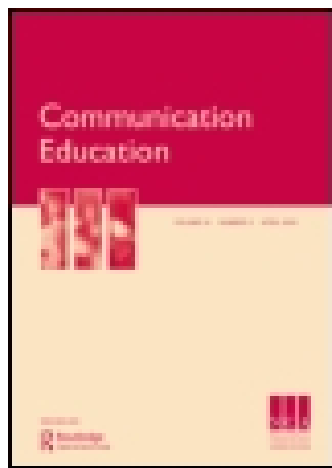
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Essential considerations in the teaching of creative dramatics

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ESSENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS IN THE TEACHING OF CREATIVE DRAMATICS

James E. Popovich

A STUDY of the progress made during the past twenty-five years in the area of speech education inevitably underscores the vast strides made in those speech disciplines applicable to children. Indeed, contemporary educational philosophy demands that today's youth be skilled in oral communication and it insists that such competence can best be effected through extensive use of various types of speech arts and activities.

Of the many techniques to accomplish this goal, Creative Dramatics has proved to be especially successful in encouraging and motivating child participation. This is reflected in the development of academic offerings in Creative Dramatics at American universities. A study undertaken by the author in 1955 indicated that over 90 leading colleges

and universities offered one or more courses in Creative Dramatics and that an additional 79 schools offered related courses in which Creative Dramatics received special attention. The same study also indicated that in any given year, over 2,000 college students take course work in Creative Dramatics. Recently, professional agencies and organizations have encouraged special training in Creative Dramatics among their members. Leaders in the fields of speech correction, recreation, child psychology, child welfare, religious education, and programs for exceptional children have expressed such interest. This interest, in addition to that of Colleges of Education which recommend Creative Dramatics for elementary school certification, indicates an unusually fertile field for development in speech departments.

James E. Popovich is a specialist in creative speech activities for children as well as having done considerable post-doctoral work in speech pathology. He was formerly in charge of the Cain Park Creative Arts School, served as a member of the Governing Board of CTC and ANTA, was the 1956 Program Chairman of CTC, and has been very active in the Southern Speech Association and the Georgia Speech Association. He is a member of the Legislative Assembly of the Speech Association of America and a former officer of the Elementary School Division. Popovich is an Associate Professor of Speech at the University of Georgia. During recent summers, he has served as a Visiting Professor at Tufts University and the University of Texas. His Ph.D. (1955) is from Northwestern University.

But if such exposure and training for personnel in other fields is so valuable, it is important for the speech field to examine carefully the quality and nature of courses available in Creative Dramatics. Much as we should like to claim an exactly high, consistent, and relatively uniform standard of instruction, a survey made four years ago indicated that such was not the case. Generally speaking, in many higher institutions, courses in Creative

Dramatics are taught by insufficiently trained or interested personnel who, for a variety of reasons, fail to recognize (or are incapable of teaching) the wide application of Creative Dramatics. In other institutions, the emerging prominence of Creative Dramatics as an area of graduate study and research has resulted in the assignment of advisers who themselves are not cognizant of either the application of the techniques, the literature, the history, or the critical areas of research possible to a scholar of Creative Dramatics. Recently, a questionnaire on Creative Dramatics, directed to speech and drama administrative personnel, indicated that many individuals who direct broad curricular policy in the speech field are themselves frequently confused as to what Creative Dramatics is or what a course in Creative Dramatics should embrace.

This article, then, is directed to those individuals who are responsible for broad academic planning in a speech department, to those in related areas who wish to understand the comprehensive offering of work in Creative Dramatics, as well as to those who will be organizing the course itself and will be concerned with specific educational methods and objectives.

THE RATIONALE

Before proceeding, however, an explanation and justification for such proposed standardization should, perhaps, be made. The need for uniform organization of the content of any academic discipline is recognized as an important and necessary procedure. Effective teaching and perceptive learning are directly related to the effectiveness of the organization of the course in question. Frequently, attempts are made to standardize the approach to such organization and to effect a national application

by uniformity. This proposed plan recognizes that any rigidly organized projected master plan which is projected may fail if it neglects the basic consideration of flexibility to meet the needs of different higher institutions.

The very nature of American higher education insures the freedom of each institution and its faculties to grant credit, to plan curricula, to organize content disciplines, to apply requirements of academic standards, etc., as the individual institution, working through its faculties, ordains. Nevertheless, responsible professional association have, throughout the history of American higher education, made recommendations regarding specific subject areas and have exerted strong ethical, regulatory, and discretionary powers. They have done this (1) to insure certain desirable unanimities regarding the content area, and (2) to suggest standards which, in the estimation of the concerned national association, are deemed necessary. We have particularly observed the success of the American Medical Association and the American Speech and Hearing Association in making such specific recommendations. The Speech Association of America might well consider proposing equally specific guidance to insure fairly uniform instruction and training in special areas.

Hence, this report, on the suggested organization of a credit-bearing course in the area of Creative Dramatics, is based upon a recognition of these concepts and responsibilities.

INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Before planning the specific requirements and objectives of any academic discipline, two considerations are fundamental; first, the amount of credit to be granted by the institution for the work and, second, whether the course

will be of an undergraduate or graduate level.

Usually at those universities currently offering courses in Creative Dramatics, the pattern tends to be that of granting three (3) semester or five (5) quarter credits. An initial assumption is usually made by the institution that the course, will appeal, as it inevitably does, to graduate students or teachers already possessing the bachelor's degree who intend to utilize this work in their graduate curriculum. At responsible schools, following the broad recommendations of national and regional accrediting bodies, this implies that if the five credits are quarter credits, the student is in a direct lecture-laboratory relationship with the instructor for no less than fifty (50) fifty-minute sessions and in required reading and research experiences for a minimum of an additional one hundred (100) hours.

Also implied in the organization of a course in Creative Dramatics granting such graduate credit is that those enrolled in such a course have graduate or near-graduate status and that their academic achievement is of graduate caliber. This means that considerable emphasis is placed upon the students' *competence* in mastering the content of the course and in mastering independent research in the area so that the students, on a graduate level, widen their understanding and perception of the academic disciplines involved. A course in Creative Dramatics at a reputable university should be organized in such a way that *content and methodology* are stressed.

Those institutions offering less credit, offering undergraduate rather than graduate credit, or credit based on the semester value, should make proper adjustments to these required minimal

standards recognized by accrediting organizations of higher education.

OBJECTIVES

Before any course can be planned effectively, an analysis of the goals and objectives of such instruction is mandatory. The wide variance of student backgrounds and experiences demands that the course be organized qualitatively to train both speech and other-major scholars. The basic purposes of a course in Creative Dramatics should be:

- (1) To teach students an understanding of the aesthetic appreciations inherent in mimetic and oral communicative experiences.
- (2) To make students aware of the relationship of literature and the literary modes to a practical application in the speech field.
- (3) To examine the history of ancient and modern pedagogy as it relates to creativity and speech instruction.
- (4) To analyze materials and research in related disciplines (such as sociology and child psychology) to understand the applicable concepts of behavioral elements inherent in mimetic participation.

In addition to these broad objectives, there are many specific aims of a course in Creative Dramatics. Some of these goals are:

- (1) To examine the role and techniques of Creative Dramatics in ensuring general speech improvement as well as social and emotional development.
- (2) To instill in prospective teachers an understanding and appreciation of Creative Dramatics and its place in the curriculum (particularly, language arts) as well as the basic attitudes and philosophy conducive to good Creative Dramatics instruction.

- (3) To indicate the specific applications of Creative Dramatics in teaching exceptional children—the speech-handicapped, the mentally retarded, the motor-handicapped, the gifted, etc.
- (4) To acquaint prospective teachers with textbooks, teaching aids, and instructional methods which make for successful Creative Dramatics experiences.

REQUIREMENTS

The content and methodology of a course in Creative Dramatics are best communicated to students through a variety of media. In addition to the textbook (and there are a few excellent ones in this field, especially Winifred Ward's *Playmaking with Children*), supplementary extra-textual materials should be encouraged, if not required.

Because one of the basic aims of a course in Creative Dramatics is to communicate methods of instruction, a series of demonstration classes with children homogeneously grouped must be required. It has been estimated by reputable instructors of Creative Dramatics in higher institutions that about half of all the sessions of the course should be devoted to observation sessions. These sessions should be conducted in such a way that a superior teacher instructing children in a normalized Creative Dramatics class will communicate the very best techniques of utilizing this method of instruction. Those students enrolled in the course need careful guidance in observing with a high degree of perception and evaluation; the Creative Dramatics instructor is necessarily responsible for such guidance.

In addition, the college students enrolled in the course should themselves have a number of class sessions devoted to exercises in creativity, pantomimic

experiences, and emotional or aesthetic responses. The material chosen for these sessions should, naturally, be of an adult level; the aim of these classes is to provide for the college students a self-participative parallel to what they are observing and noting in the observation sessions.

Students enrolled in the course in Creative Dramatics should be expected to familiarize themselves with bibliographic materials in the university library. The instructor can effectively do this by requiring written or oral book reports. A research paper dealing with some phase of Creative Dramatics should also be required. This research paper should involve intensive library study and frequent conferences with the instructor. Final examinations and periodic quizzes are, of course, excellent methods of encouraging and testing the competence of the learners.

Thus, demonstration classes, observation reports, participation sessions, library research, book reports on outside readings and examinations can help re-enforce learning as well as challenge the students enrolled in Creative Dramatics.

AN OUTLINE OF THE CONTENT MATERIAL

Various lecturers find different methods of teaching effective depending upon the personal techniques of instruction. However, regardless of the order or the method, the following content of the Creative Dramatics subject area must be thoroughly covered:

- I. Introductory Unit
 - A. The role of Speech Education and its significance
 - B. The purposes and objectives of Creative Dramatics
 - C. A definition of terms
 - D. Creative Dramatics as an oral and pantomimic art form
 - E. Creative Dramatics and its relationship with oral interpretation of literature

- F. The Creative Spirit and self-expression
- II. The Relationship of Creative Dramatics to Child Growth
 - A. Significant factors of child growth and development (a review of applicable child psychology)
 - B. The early phases of Creative Dramatics
 - 1. Dramatic Play
 - 2. Pantomime and rhythms
 - 3. Improvisation
 - C. The more complex phases of Creative Dramatics
 - 1. Characterization
 - 2. Story dramatization
- III. The Procedure for Creative Dramatics
 - A. Motivational methods
 - B. Presentation of material
 - C. Planning of dramatization
 - D. The playing
 - E. Methods of evaluation of the playing
 - F. Re-playing
 - G. Materials for Creative Dramatics (discussion of children's literature)
- IV. Uses of Creative Dramatics (covering kinds of Creative Dramatics activities, materials, etc., for each type of institution and age level appeal of children involved)
 - A. Creative Dramatics in the classroom
 - 1. Language Arts
 - 2. Speech Improvement
 - 3. Course integration and the project method of teaching
 - B. Creative Dramatics in the community
 - 1. Religious Education
 - 2. Home and neighborhood
 - 3. Recreation (Girl Scouts, playgrounds, etc.)
 - C. Creative Dramatics and therapy
 - 1. Special education problems
 - a. Mentally retarded (educable and trainable)
 - b. Motor-handicapped
 - c. Gifted
 - 2. Speech Correction
- V. Creative Dramatics and modern educational philosophy (a review of history and development of Creative Dramatics)

CONCLUSION

During the past quarter century, the field of Creative Dramatics has grown more rapidly, developed more adherents, and elicited more interest than possibly any area of speech education. Its remarkable growth and recognition has been due to the uniqueness of the discipline and its excellent participative and motivating elements. It has already made a significant contribution to the speech field. Now it stands on the threshold of unique service to other disciplines and areas—particularly education; recreation; religion; and socio-, psycho-, and speech-therapy. Those institutions not offering work in Creative Dramatics at present should be examining the potential service such a course might give. At the nearly one hundred institutions now offering such work administrators of speech departments and instructors of courses in Creative Dramatics will want to review their offerings. For Creative Dramatics, dealing with a complex behavioral activity, demands a high standard of competence since it emphasizes both content and methodology. To meet such requirements, this plan recommends that institutions of higher learning organize courses in Creative Dramatics to include strong emphases on content communication, observation and demonstration sessions, library research, careful reading of relevant bibliography and effective testing methods.